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Published in:
Romance Quarterly

DOI:
[10.1080/08831157.2017.1356135](https://doi.org/10.1080/08831157.2017.1356135)

IMPORTANT NOTE: You are advised to consult the publisher's version (publisher's PDF) if you wish to cite from it. Please check the document version below.

Document Version
Publisher's PDF, also known as Version of record

Publication date:
2017

[Link to publication in University of Groningen/UMCG research database](#)

Citation for published version (APA):

Valdivia, P. (2017). Literature, crisis, and Spanish rural space in the context of the 2008 financial recession. *Romance Quarterly*, 64(4), 163-171. <https://doi.org/10.1080/08831157.2017.1356135>

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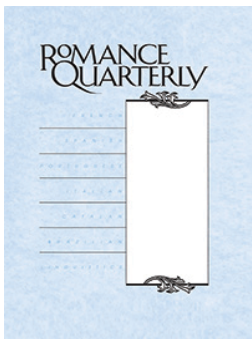
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To cite this article: Pablo Valdivia (2017) Literature, crisis, and Spanish rural space in the context of the 2008 financial recession, *Romance Quarterly*, 64:4, 163-171, DOI: [10.1080/08831157.2017.1356135](https://doi.org/10.1080/08831157.2017.1356135)

To link to this article: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/08831157.2017.1356135>



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Published online: 31 Aug 2017.



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Literature, crisis, and Spanish rural space in the context of the 2008 financial recession

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ABSTRACT

The novelistic production related to the 2008 financial crisis has been partially studied from the lens of the label of “literatura de la crisis.” In this article, I analyze the complex and essential transformations suffered by literary writing practices in contemporary Spain where ill attention has been devoted to the social, political, and aesthetic implications of neoliberal globalization in rural areas. Departing from a thorough conceptualization of the notion of “literatura de la crisis” and its paradoxical impact over the most recent literary production, I study the rural discourse and the emerging academic challenges for the assessment of the rural experience in literary works. In conclusion, I set the main principles for the development of a transposable model of textual analysis that will shed new light on the cultural representation of the rural sphere in the aftermath of the 2008 financial recession.



KEYWORDS

Caballos de Labor; Antonio Castellote; cognitive semantics; literature and crisis; rural cultural studies

Introduction

The 2008 financial crisis brought about fundamental changes not only in the traditional way in which books were produced but also in the manner they were written and consumed (Crosthwaite, *Criticism, Crisis, and Contemporary Narrative*; Vidal-Vázquez). This article builds on three previous publications, i.e., “Narrando la crisis financiera de 2008 y sus repercusiones” (Valdivia, “Narrando”); “La novela española contemporánea ante la crisis financiera de 2008: mercado editorial y renovación” (Valdivia, “La novela”); and “Narrativas de la crisis en el ámbito rural: el caso de *Caballos de Labor* de Antonio Castellote” (Valdivia, “Narrativas”), in which I problematized the typological articulation of the 2008 crisis novels in the Spanish context (Valdivia, “Narrando”). Furthermore, my previous works analyzed the intricate parallels between the editorial market “bubble” and the real-estate bust (Valdivia, “La novela”). One key factor, essential in the recent transformation of literary production, were the cultural practices of social media and the Internet, domains in which the normative power of academia has been surpassed by the data fluxes of informal networks (Holmes; Taylor and Harris). Thus content producers and consumers have used alternative communication channels facilitated by digital platforms and social media (Castells). These have channeled the dissemination of a new corpus of novels, which engages with the sociopolitical context of the 2008 financial crisis and its aftermath at several levels and directions, i.e., thematic, ideological, and/or aesthetic (Fominaya and Cox; Moreno-Caballud, *La imaginación sostenible*, “Cultures of Anyone”).

In one of my latest studies on the novelistic production connected to the 2008 crisis and its aftermath (Valdivia, “Narrativas”), I emphasized the lack of attention given to novels that were not considered to match a preconceived set of literary stereotypes attached to the label of the “Literatura de la crisis [Crisis Literature]” and its commercial exploitation. This label had been created by mass media and several

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mainstream publishing houses (Rodríguez Marcos). The term “literatura de la crisis” mainly privileged literary representations of, first, urban spaces; second, the tragedy caused by the loss of certainty; and, finally, the present as a process of identitarian dispossession. Consequently, I traced a recurrent formula that characterized most of these novels: urban space + nostalgia + identity reassessment = crisis novel. Many exemplary novels adhered to this formula: *Ejército enemigo* (2011) by Alberto Olmos; *Ajuste de Cuentas* (2013) by Benjamín Prado; *Democracia* (2012) by Pablo Guitérrez; *La trabajadora* (2014) by Elvira Navarro; *Los besos en el pan* (2015) by Almudena Grandes; *Hombres desnudos* (2015) by Alicia Giménez Barlett; *Cicatriz* (2015) by Sara Mesa; *Los libros repentinos* (2015) by Pablo Gutiérrez; and *Blitz* (2015) by David Trueba, among others. These novels shared similar features, although under different modalities and variations depending on the specific editorial scope of each publishing house and individual aesthetic imaginary of the writer (Ingenschay; Sanz Villanueva, “Las letras y la crisis,” “La literatura de la crisis”).

In spite of the dominance of this formula, two important studies from the field of social sciences—*Geografía de la crisis económica en España* by Juan Miguel Albertos Puebla et al., and *Atlas de la Crisis: Impactos socioeconómicos y territorios vulnerables en España* by Ricardo Méndez et al.—recently alerted scholarly attention to a much more complex picture of the impact of the 2008 financial crisis and its aftermath in the Spanish context. Both studies coincide in the conclusion that the crisis has not impacted the large and heterogeneous territory of Spain in a uniform way. In fact, the results of the Spanish general elections on 26 June 2016¹ suggest that rural areas² play a decisive role in creating the potential for either political stalemate or change. Notwithstanding, rural areas have occupied, both as a problem and as a setting, a very peripheral position within the novelistic production referring to the 2008 crisis and its aftermaths (Valdivia, “Narrativas”).

These introductory remarks, in addition to the theoretical considerations stated by Lakoff and Johnson’s initial ideas in *Metaphors We Live By*, combined with the conceptual elaborations by L. Holmgren, “Setting the Neo-liberal Agenda: How Metaphors Help Shape Socio-Economic Realities” and L. Pellizzoni, “Metaphors and Problematizations,” inform the threefold goal of the present analysis: (a) to historicize how the notion of “literatura de la crisis” was originally coined for commercial purposes but paradoxically opened up new paths for the dissemination and production of novels that otherwise would have never reached the general public; (b) to problematize political and cultural renewal through literary language in the rural space; and (c) to draw the limitations and challenges for a new theoretical framework of literary analysis that will assist and support researchers in future studies on cultural narratives representing the rural experience.

“Literatura de la crisis”: A commercial term with paradoxical results

The term “literatura de la crisis” was used for the first time in the Spanish national press on 16 March 2013. *El País* published a press report titled “Una crisis de novela: La recesión económica se ha convertido en argumento literario”³ by Javier Rodríguez Marcos. This report was not included in the Culture section or in the pages of the literary supplement “Babelia” but in the Society section. This is an interesting fact as the article was clearly addressing readers whose main interest was not literature but who would potentially interpret the article as a piece of sociological research. Rodríguez Marcos focused on two specific texts: *Democracia* (2013) by Pablo Gutiérrez and *En la orilla* (2013) by Rafael Chirbes. The journalist added that these were “solo dos ejemplos de cómo la crisis económica se ha filtrado en los libros. Si la novela, según la clásica definición de Stendhal, es un espejo a lo largo de un camino, la imagen que hoy devuelve ese espejo es la de obras paradas, colas del paro, neveras vacías, indignación y desconcierto” (Rodríguez Marcos). Only a few days earlier, Rodríguez Marcos had published, also in *El País*, an article titled “La gran novela de la crisis en España” (2 March 2013) on the new book release by Rafael Chirbes: *En la orilla* (2013). Retrospectively, both article and report indicated a revival of the nineteenth-century realist notion of “literature as mirror of reality.” This reception was signaled and promoted from official cultural institutions and manifest in the awards received by Chirbes—Premio de la Crítica—for *Crematorio* (2008) and “Premio Nacional de Literatura” *En la orilla* (2013).

Rodríguez Marcos' comparison between *Democracia* and *En la orilla* has proven to be very problematic. As demonstrated by Mauro Jiménez in his article "Rafael Chirbes o cómo pinchar la burbuja," Chirbes' aesthetic literary practice was characterized by an acute criticism of the hypocrisy and wrongdoings that forged, according to this writer, the fledgling pillars of the Spanish democracy:

Lo vemos a diario: muchos novelistas contemporáneos siguen convencidos de que su visión es una visión a contrapelo de la dominante, cuando ya hace tiempo que se han convertido en parte de la narración con que el poder se viste. A lo mejor, ellos no lo saben, pero lo que en sus primeros libros fue investigación ya es poco más que retórica. El novelista está obligado a ser un animal atento, liebre, pulga; a saber escapar un minuto antes de que el poder lo colonice. (Chirbes 9)

As noted by Jiménez, Chirbes discredited his alleged belonging to the "literatura de la crisis." He conceived writing as an exercise of radical sovereignty whose main aim was addressed at dismantling, analyzing, and highlighting the conflicts created by the lack of a real democratic culture in Spain:

Por hablar de un fenómeno reciente en España: hemos asistido a la aparición de un flujo de novelas supuestamente dedicadas a recuperar la memoria de los vencidos en la guerra civil, que se nos ofrecía como investigación en un tema tabú, y que, sin embargo, ha acabado siendo más bien una consoladora narrativa de los sentimientos, al servicio de lo hegemónico [...] Cuando el código hegemónico parece ocuparlo todo, cuando, desde lo que nos parece una libertad artística absoluta, nada hiere el discurso dominante, la oscuridad del novelista que indaga su propia posición entre la grasa de los mecanismos de la máquina de su tiempo no es más que la particular forma de violencia a que se somete. (Chirbes 10–12)

In Chirbes' words, there was a general literary practice during the Spanish Transition to democracy (1975–1982) that embraced, even unconsciously, the hegemonic cultural narrative articulated by an incipient neoliberal agenda (González Madrid 2008) developed in Spain during the 1980s and 1990s. Nevertheless, Chirbes located his very aesthetic affiliation profoundly within literary realism, which in itself had a long tradition in Hispanic culture. In this sense, Chirbes understood writing as a foundational practice for revealing the power mechanisms of his time. Departing from a similar mindset, the writer Joaquín Pérez Azaústre published an interesting meditation in *El País* on January 24, 2013 on the tragic events unleashed by the 2008 financial crisis in Spain: evictions, salary cuts, and violence, among other facts that captured the attention of the Spanish media. The title of Pérez Azaústre's column was "Literatura y crisis: La situación hoy nos exige no un cambio de mirada en el enfoque verbal, sino una indignación." In this text, he traced a genealogy of literature and unrest. According to him, writing in Spain "siempre ha sido llorar, sin que eso nos acerque al escritor llorón, que es también una especie. El llanto era moral, porque una sociedad que no sabe cuidar a sus autores, a sus editoriales, a sus libros y a sus librerías, es una sociedad no únicamente más envilecida, por deshumanizada y por salvaje, por tan poco ilustrada, sino esencialmente una sociedad de individuos mucho menos libres, menos individuos y menos ciudadanos" (Pérez Azaústre). Indeed, as Chirbes had also argued, the production of literary works that engaged with the notion of crisis is not a recent phenomenon. Social unbalances produced by economic factors have been the object of aesthetic and intellectual meditation from diverse prisms in modern Spain: Antonio Machado in *Campos de Castilla* (1912) or Federico García Lorca in *Poeta en Nueva York* (1929–1930), among many other iconic texts in the Hispanic literary tradition.

Consequently, "literatura de la crisis" is a term that attempted to contextualize and update a pre-existent aesthetic tradition in Hispanic letters for commercial reasons. However, the commercial term paradoxically opened the cultural market to a range of novels also written or conceived in blogs that were later published in digital editions and finally in print, such as *Cenital* by Emilio Bueso (2012) and *Caballos de Labor* by Antonio Castellote (2012). As I already noted earlier, these works emerged in the margins of the traditional editorial channels (Valdivia 2016a). It is in this literature written from the margins where we find the most daring and ambitious literary practices—as they do not try to fit a pre-conceived commercial category or to please a specific reader but merely to express social and aesthetic contradictions—that closely engage with the renewal of cultural imaginaries after the 2008 financial crisis: namely the new aesthetics of uncertainty and the financialization of every single aspect of daily life. This is a process of renewal that has also been followed in some of publishing house Seix Barral's latest

literary releases: *Intemperie* (2013) and *La tierra que pisamos* (2016), both by Jesús Carrasco. Moreover, Carrasco epitomizes one of the consequences suffered by the editorial market: the need to open to new authors who proposed fresh narratives articulated far from the exhausted models of the subgenre of the historical novel or social realism. In both Carrasco novels—but also in Castellote's *Caballos de labor*—the innovation comes, to a considerable extent, from a change in the focus: in their fictions the new privileged territory is rural space, an unknown symbolic space whose constitutive metaphor still requires mapping and analysis.

The rural metaphor

According to Crosthwaite (*Criticism, Crisis, and Contemporary Narrative*; “Is a Financial Crisis a Trauma?”) all crises are symbolic. In a situation of crisis, a certain set of metaphors that are constitutive of our reality become replaced, challenged, or put into question by others. In 2014, Esther Peeren's *The Spectral Metaphor* argued that the globalization process produced different modes of invisibilization, and these modes are articulated by cultural narratives based on the textual representation of our reality. Neoliberal political and economic practices have proved to be particularly efficient in spectralizing those elements of the social fabric that suffer exclusion and dispossession (Milanovic; Peeren). The 2008 financial crisis has not only crystallized a new historical consciousness based on the notion of a permanent state of crisis as opposed to the notion of progress (Castells et al.), but also neoliberal policies have created an entirely new logic⁴ (Gago) and class: the Precariat, as explained by Guy Standing. Metaphors, from Lakoff and Turner's perspective, are:

crucial to conceptualisation and reasoning. We use inference patterns from one conceptual domain to reason about another domain. Even fundamental idea, like time, causation, morality, the self are *almost entirely structured by elaborate systems of conceptual metaphor* [Lakoff and Johnson 249]. Metaphors help give coherence to experience. They allow us to understand one kind of thing in terms of another. Moreover, as Lakoff and Johnson note, new metaphors create new realities because thanks to them we start to comprehend our experience differently, acting and producing consequences accordingly. (Pellizzoni 78)

Raymond Williams, too, in an early study titled *The Country and the City* (1973), dove into the symbolic creation of space and meaning in non-urban areas. More recently, Alberto Godioli in “Walking Tours, Subjective Maps, and Spatial Justice: Urban and Non-Urban Space in Contemporary Italian Literature” has offered a very convincing approach to how novels provide an experience of space that is key to understanding the tensions that configure rural cultural narratives. In Godioli's view:⁵

Specificities aside, however, the whole of our corpus is characterized by a fundamental contrast, whereby the lived, sensory experience of specific places is opposed to the loss of a direct link between space and individual human beings in contemporary societies—be it due to abstract and unrealistic urban plans, or to the homogenizing and despatializing trends inherent to neoliberal globalization. The need to bridge the gap between the human experience of space and broader social, political or geographical phenomena is, in fact, not only a recurring *topos* in contemporary literature, but also a growing priority for a wide range of disciplines: from affective urbanism and urban ethnography to spatial justice and environmental studies. (14)

Godioli's accurate views on the role developed by the neoliberal globalization and the need to connect human experience of space with social, political, or geographical phenomena both highlight and remind us of the essential role of literary language as cognitive source of knowledge. Namely, the analysis of the metaphors provided by the works of those novelists who engaged with the tension between the local and the global in non-urban areas provide the possibility of ideologically mapping—as Slavoj Žižek argued, a set of beliefs constitutes ideological matrixes traceable by textual analysis and reading strategies—key aspects that articulate the disaffection and distance experienced from the rural space toward the globalized urban areas. Such disjoint has had strong political implications as we have already seen in the Spanish political scene.

Language is never innocent, and Holmgreen has revealed that the neoliberal agenda has put forward a determined set of metaphors around the very notion of financial crisis. Financial neoliberal report metaphors show common patterns such as (a) the state of the economy is likened to the state of health of

a person, (b) the economy is a person, and (c) the economy is a flexible object and product of a natural disaster (Holmgreen 106). Moreover, the neoliberal metaphors have encapsulated the rural in a spectral space barely known, either to artists or political scientists.

If we agree that the non-urban plays a determinant role in our societies, what, then, are the metaphors that constitute rural space? In the case of the Spanish “literatura de la crisis,” Castellote novel’s *Caballos de Labor* (2012) offers a case study where such alternative representation of the social fabric is represented convincingly. The novel starts with the death of José Antonio Labordeta,⁶ writer, singer, and Spanish MP famous for his engagement with the rural social reality. The narrator describes how Spanish national television covered a brief tribute to his memory by providing a reductionist narrative: “Luego han puesto un reportaje con tres imágenes: Labordeta mandando a la mierda a un diputado conservador, Labordeta con la mochila al hombro en un programa de televisión, y Labordeta enfermo e hinchado, sonriendo a los amigos, en uno de los muchos homenajes que le han hecho últimamente, desde que tuvo claro que se iba a morir” (Castellote 12). In this novel, the narrator is an unemployed engineer in his early forties who has been fired from his company due to general cutbacks in the aftermath of the 2008 financial crisis. After years living in a big city, he comes back to his village and his parents’ house in the mountains of Aragón. His brother, Martín, never left the village, and they reencounter each other after years of being separated. The disjoint between the two different sets of cultural references personified by the brothers brings into conflict two antagonistic views of Spain after the 2008 crisis. While the narrator speaks about job cuts, the repercussions of the crisis, and the difficulties to find a job as an engineer, Martín depicts a completely different situation: “Aquí no se habla de la situación económica sino de la soledad, porque nuestro padre es leñero y no hemos pasado hambre en la vida. Las largas horas y los tristes meses no son cosas del capitalismo” (16). In the songs written by Labordeta, Martín finds the linguistic representation of a diverse and opposed reality to the one experienced by his brother in the urban sphere. There is a conflict of decoding processes. While for the narrator Labordeta talks about class problems, Martín interprets Labordeta’s metaphors as examples of the loneliness and the hard life in the country. These two conflicting interpretations about one shared object or statement are a common pattern throughout the novel. However, it is important to add that the narrator will experiment a progressive psychological development, which will eventually allow him, by the end, to understand the metaphor his brother lives by in the rural space.

The narrator finds himself in a historical loop of sorts that engages with Chirbes’ idea that the 2008 financial crisis was also the direct consequence of several democratic deficits present in the Spanish democracy after the death of General Francisco Franco. Furthermore, on an ironic note, the narrator asserts that:

Aquel verano del 75 yo estaba más o menos como ahora que acaba el del 2010. Había terminado los estudios y no sabía por dónde tirar, igual que ahora, que se me ha terminado el trabajo y tampoco sé por dónde tirar. Entonces dudaba si irme a Londres o a París, vestía de negro y cuando me preguntaban por Franco yo decía que era una moneda. Mi hermano no. Mi hermano trabajaba entonces y trabaja ahora (17)

Such dissociation between the two brothers relies actually on the metaphor of the rural space as motionless sphere. The effects of the 2008 economic crisis neither impacted Martín’s way of life, nor his immediate reality. For Martín such a lack of dynamism is his only reality. He inhabits the metaphor of the rural life as a human body that follows the biological process of nature: life gets stuck, gets old, and gets rotten. According to Martín, it is useless to try to modify this natural order of things as the only certainty is that change cannot be achieved: “Luego las cosas se enquistan, se ajean, se pudren. Querer cambiarlas es una ilusión que se estila en las ciudades, pero lo más probable es que no sirva para nada” (18). Therefore, another opposition articulates the cultural imaginary of the rural: real life only takes places in the countryside in antagonism to urban space as a territory of empty illusions. The dialectics of fullness in resistance to the emptiness convey a general assumption in the characters of the novel that life in the countryside is more authentic, more real. This conflict-based conceptual relationship is expressed by the two brothers in the reproduction of traditions as the narrator points out when assuring that “En mi hermano nunca he sabido dónde terminaban las costumbres y empezaba la reproducción de las costumbres (30).” Or alluding to the stationary of the rural inhabitants: “A sus ochenta y cinco

años, mi madre está en el mismo sitio que cuando tenía mi edad (37).” Even the metaphor of the rural as a territory out of History, Time, and, of course, Politics:

La Biblia la escribió ella. Pero ella está fuerte todavía, más que mi padre, a pesar de la prótesis de plástico que lleva en la cadera, la hipótesis, como dice ella, me duele la hipótesis. Le duelo yo. Cuando estamos comiendo y digo algo que no sea pedir que me pasen el pan ella tiende a mirarme entornando la vista, como si me mirara desde lejos, o se intentara proteger de lo que oye, o pusiera los cinco sentidos para corroborar su impresión de que yo hablo mucho de política pero aquí estoy, sentado en la mesa, a la sopa boba. A veces hilvano una conversación inocua, una conversación en la que yo no tengo nada que opinar, un repertorio de parentescos y de casamientos que es el no hablar diciendo algo, al menos para mí, aunque para ella es como seguir batiendo la vida del pueblo, como el ajoaceite, para que no se le desate. Y aun con todo, siempre que puede, me pregunta si ya sé algo de la oficina. Se imagina que soy como un cesante galdosiano, alguien que está esperando eternamente que lo llamen de un momento para otro. No se fía. Pero tampoco se ha fiado en estos últimos veinte años, cada vez que me ha preguntado si la empresa esa era un trabajo seguro o me podían despedir. Al final ha tenido razón (38).

The narrator expresses that he is the source of her mother's pain. This metaphor of the urban space as a territory of pain, sorrow, and unreliability is reinforced in the previous paragraph. As soon as the novel evolves, the narrator experiences the rural space from a spectral perspective “como si me hubiera muerto, o como si se hubiera muerto quien no he sido” (43) as he feels out of place. Here the metaphor of the specter gains importance and is highlighted in diverse passages of the novel, to the extent that the narrator will assert “no puedo evitar la sensación incorpórea de los fantasmas, la pérdida del equilibrio temporal, de no saber cuándo estoy” (45). In the rural space, Martín and the narrator's parents do not doubt who they are and where they are. They seem to live in an extemporal reliable metaphor. However, the difference from the mere “alabanza de aldea y menosprecio de corte” provided by the metaphor of “aquí no pasa el tiempo” is strongly contrasted with the presence of the technological developments and hyper-connectivity. Martín lives in a rural hyper-connected metaphor thanks to the Internet. Physical isolationism co-exists with the infinite potential to access information provided from distant places in the world:

Martín quiso trasladar todos los libros y discos que había acumulado aquí a su casa nueva, casa sin dueña, pero hubo una razón más poderosa incluso que los lloros de mi madre para impedir que Martín se fuera del todo: la tecnología. Durante bastantes años este palomar ha sido el único sitio con cobertura en toda esta parte del pueblo, excluido, supongo, el campanario de la iglesia, a donde nunca he subido. Este es el radar donde mi hermano se pone en contacto con su mundo, con la sociedad hípica percherona y la de lutieres tradicionales y la de agricultores ecologistas, con el colectivo Sollavientos y el de protectores del chopo cabecero y el de criadores de gallinas negras. La red sirve para ampliar fronteras pero en el caso de mi hermano son fronteras infinitesimales, puertas al espacio interior del sur del Maestrazgo. (45)

The final words of the previous quote reveal one of the specificities of the contemporary rural sphere. The doors opened to the interior of the region, the metaphor of the non-physical house, connect the local with the local and not the local with the global. Martín's attitude is not an imposition but a free choice. And only when the narrator fully assumes the metaphor of the rural space as the interior of a house, where he can finally experience the rural as the condition of possibility of the authentic, the spectral disjoint disappears by creating an “aleph” where past, present, and future converge out of any contingent representations of historical (thus, political) practice:

Y ese fue, supongo, el único momento desde que entré en la casa del padre que el fantasma, el verbo y el recuerdo se hicieron carne y la luz de la tarde, con el pueblo ya de espaldas al sol, volvió a adquirir la consistencia de lo verdadero. Era ese mínimo punto de luz que queda en una brasa antes de que se consuma, un entusiasmo infantil que es el sentimiento más puro que recuerdo haber tenido en mucho tiempo. El caballo es anterior a las palomas. El macho, como llaman aquí a los mulos, es antes que los pájaros. Nunca supe distinguir a los zorrales pero me sigue gustando el olor de los establos. (49)

The metaphor of rural space as an extemporal territory, the return to childhood, and the representational construction of the idea of Truth based on the materialism of tangible aspects of life articulates a cultural imaginary in which the 2008 financial crisis and its aftermath end up being a mere illusion before such apparently immutable human and natural context. In short, (a) the metaphor of the immutability of time (“aquí el tiempo no pasa”); (b) the metaphor of the authentic hyper-connected privacy (“puertas

al espacio interior del sur”); and (c) the metaphor of the pain brought by the person who epitomizes the emptiness of the urban sphere (“le duele la hipótesis [...] le duelo yo”) are some of the constitutive metaphors that forge the ideological mapping provided by *Caballos de Labor*. Moreover, according to Méndez, “la escasa atención social y mediática prestada a los componentes territoriales de la crisis, en apariencia irrelevantes frente a los económico-financieros, sociales o políticos, puede favorecer la implícita suposición de que esta no afecta de forma significativa a los contrastes heredados, ya sea entre las regiones, las áreas urbanas y las rurales” (242). In other words, it will be impossible to articulate political change and proceed to a thorough analysis of the responses to the 2008 financial crisis until we develop the necessary theoretical tools that will allow us to save the gap of attention projected by the mainstream and most of the cultural responses to the 2008 financial crises wrapped up in the commercially driven term of “literatura de la crisis.”⁷

Conclusions: Limitations and challenges

My analysis has underlined the lack of scholarly knowledge for assessing the cultural responses and narratives related to the 2008 crisis and its aftermath. Very few novels, with the exception of the object of study in this article (*Caballos de Labor*), have dealt with the ideological complexities of rural spaces. Moreover, we lack the tools to study rural spaces as neither subaltern nor as minority but as spaces with their own logic. Cognitive semantics can offer a fruitful point of departure but only in the intersection with other disciplines such as economics, political science, geography, and anthropology. As explained by Paul Cloke in “Rurality and Otherness”:

Rurality is a complex concept. At one level we are often content to fall back on key characteristics which historically have been associated with rurality and rural life and which translate into objects of desire in contemporary society. [...] the countryside is thus often viewed in terms of being dominated (either currently or in the recent past) by extensive land uses, being characterized by small-scale settlement that has strong affinity with the surrounding environment, and offering a close-knit and cohesive way of life. (380)

Therefore, our knowledge of the rural is very limited, and it is biased by the stereotyping characteristics of the idyll (380). Raymond Williams’ “Structure of Feeling” conceptualized the gap between the official discourse of policy and regulations, the popular response to official discourse and its appropriation in literary and other cultural texts.⁸ This theoretical approach is still valuable. However, Williams coined the term in 1954 when the digital revolution was far from being a reality. Consequently, the scholarly assessment of the cultural narratives produced in and about the rural sphere needs to take into consideration new factors and actors such as the neoliberal implementation of social and political policies and the emergence of the Precariat. In conclusion, the novelty of this unprecedented paradigm obliges academic approaches to rethink their own limitations but, above all, to re-examine unsolved structural territorial social and cultural conflicts: understanding the rural space remains an unfinished business.

Acknowledgments

I would like to especially thank Dr. Esther Peeren for her inspiring ideas that I follow in this article. I want to express my gratitude to Dr. Konstantin Mierau and Dr. Alberto Godioli for their suggestions and comments to my article. Also, I would like to acknowledge the feedback provided by the members of the European Literature and Culture Research Seminars at the University of Groningen.

Notes

1. According to the official data offered by the Spanish House of Parliament, rural areas mainly voted for the most conservative options of the political spectrum (Ministerio del Interior. Subsecretaría. Dirección General de Política Interior. 2016. <<http://resultados2016.infoelecciones.es/99CO/DCO99999TO.htm>>. 30 November 2016).
2. The empirical study carried out by Goerlich and Cantarino, “Estimaciones de la población rural y urbana a nivel municipal,” evidences that: “Con criterios Eurostat, un 84,6% de municipios son clasificados como rurales, un 12,6% como intermedios, y tan sólo un 2,7% como urbanos. Aunque estos últimos representan sólo 220 municipios, albergan algo más de la mitad de la población, el 53,7%” (25).

3. This article is available online: <http://sociedad.elpais.com/sociedad/2013/03/16/actualidad/1363470608_130051.html>.
4. On this particular aspect, Gago affirms that: “Por *neoliberalismo desde abajo* me refiero entonces a un conjunto de condiciones que se concretan más allá de la voluntad de un gobierno, de su legitimidad o no, pero que se convierten en condiciones sobre las que opera una red de prácticas y saberes que asume el cálculo como matriz subjetiva primordial y que funciona como motor de una poderosa economía popular que mixture saberes comunitarios autogestivos e intimidad con el saber-hacer en la crisis como tecnología de una autoempresarialidad de masas. La fuerza del neoliberalismo así pensado acaba arraigando en los sectores que protagonizan la llamada economía informal como una *pragmática vitalista*.” (25).
5. Godioli refers in his article to a corpus of Italian novels that present close conceptual bridges to the “literatura de la crisis” production.
6. José Antonio Labordeta (1935–2010): His songs are anthems, not only in Aragón but all around Spain. Poetic songs such as “Aragón,” “Canto a la Libertad” (Song for Freedom), or “Me dicen que no quieres” (They tell me you don’t want to) are known all around the Iberian Peninsula. He was also the founder of the *Andalán* newspaper, which was very influential during the 1970s. From 2000 until retiring in 2008, he represented the province of Zaragoza in the Spanish Congress for Chunta Aragonesista (Aragonese Union), an Aragonese political party (*Gran Enciclopedia Aragonesa*. <http://www.encyclopedia-aragonesa.com/voz.asp?voz_id=7559&tipo_búsqueda=1&nombre=Labordeta&categoria_id=&subcategoria_id=&conImagenes=>).
7. In my view, such banalization of the crisis and its tragic repercussions are well personified in two opportunistic and strategic novels, *Los besos en el pan* (2015) by Almudena Grandes and *Hombres desnudos* (2015) by Alicia Giménez Barlett, that explicitly were announced by their correspondent publishing houses as the “Novel of the Crisis.” The latter was awarded the Planeta prize of literature.
8. See Oxford Reference: <<http://www.oxfordreference.com/view/10.1093/oi/authority.20110803100538488>>. On the latest development on Williams’ “Structure of Feeling,” see Paul Filmer, “Structures of Feeling and Socio-Cultural Formations: The Significance of Literature and Experience to Raymond Williams’s Sociology of Culture.”

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